

TRAVEL WELL: 9 WAYS TO AVOID GERMS ON A PLANE

Ultimately, even as COVID-19 has spread across the globe and while we continue to see surges in cases, experts are still learning about the virus. But for now, the CDC notes that it likely spreads similarly to most other viruses, via close person-to-person contact and respiratory droplets, making planes - which put people in close contact with one another - an arguably tricky place. Here's how to keep yourself and others safe and lower your risk of exposure of COVID-19 (and other viruses, for that matter) if a flight is in your future.

WEAR A MASK

The CDC recommends wearing face coverings "in public settings and when around people who don't live in your household, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain." An airplane certainly fits the bill. "When you sit in your own seat, it might feel like personal space, but you're still in a public space," says Amler. "You should continue to wear a mask to help protect the airspace from infected particles." Mask wearing can reduce the amount of virus in the airspace and - since even people who don't know they're sick with the infection can still expel enough virus with just exhaled breath to infect someone else - it's a measure to keep others safe. "If everybody in an area is wearing a mask, then you're basically keeping a space from getting contaminated with virus droplets," says Amler.

RESEARCH AIRLINE POLICIES AROUND SOCIAL DISTANCING BEFORE BOOKING

It's fair to wonder what airlines are doing to keep planes clean, keep passengers and staff safe, and keep virus risk low. After all, pre-COVID, research already suggested that sitting simply within two rows of someone with flu-like symptoms puts you at a 3.6% increased risk of getting sick with what they have. So how can you keep your distance on planes? Well, for now, it'll depend on the airline you're flying. "The risk of transmission is much wider than we originally thought and the only way to protect yourself is to block exposure at every chance that you can." Consider booking with an airline that matches up with your expectations and personal requirements.

WASH YOUR HANDS

Scrub your hands with water and any soap for at least 20 seconds to stay safe and clean, suggests the CDC. And remember: Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. These are the portals into your body for viruses.

PACK AN ALCOHOL-BASED SANITIZER

Make sure it has at least 60% alcohol content, an amount that can neutralize germs. (Tried-and-true travel-friendly **Purell** will do the trick, as will something like **Honest's** spray sanitizer.)

WIPE DOWN YOUR AREA

Use a disinfectant with that same threshold of alcohol content (minimum 60%). Wipe your seat, the seatback in front of you, the tray table, armrest, seat belt, and the buttons for the fan and light overhead.

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CONSIDER GOING SNACK-FREE ON SHORT FLIGHTS

Airlines like Emirates have reduced in-flight food and beverage service to personal bento boxes to limit contact between the crew and passengers. If you're hungry or have a health condition where regular meal intervals are required, you should eat. But eating does require you to take your mask off—potentially putting others around you at risk. If you can go without a snack on a short flight, consider it.

BE IN THE KNOW

Staying up-to-date with travel notices, hot spots, and federal, state, and local regulations regarding travel is important. If you're flying to a domestic destination, start by checking the CDC's considerations for travel in the U.S. and state health departments' websites. For international travel, look to the U.S. State Department's country-specific COVID recommendations.

GET THE FLU SHOT

While researchers around the world are working to develop one, as of now, there is no vaccine to prevent the coronavirus. But it's never too late to get a flu shot, which can protect you against the sometimes serious (and deadly) flu. The CDC recommends getting the flu shot by October, ahead of the fall flu season.

WHEN IN DOUBT, FOLLOW THE FOUR Ws

To stay healthy whenever you leave home, former CDC director Dr. Tom Frieden recently tweeted to follow the "three W's": wear a mask, wash your hands, watch your distance. Amler adds a fourth: walk away. "Try to spend as little time as you can in situations that are close quarters," he says. "If you're crowded in, even for a short time, there's a chance you can get exposed." Keep this in mind in gate areas, when using airport transportation, and in common areas on planes.

TAKEAWAY

As domestic flights have slowly started to return, airlines have implemented a slew of different regulations, too, including temperature screenings, mask requirements, adjusted boarding processes, and the distribution of sanitizing wipes.

It has been said at the outset that we are all on a learning curve and as information evolves, guidelines also are likely to change - and that's what has happened and what will likely continue to happen until we get our arms around this virus and get a vaccine that can crush it.